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ABSTRACT

This report discusses issues having a major impact on "Study Talk," the Queensland component of an Australian language development project. After first outlining the procedures and organizational structures used to set up and conduct "Study Talk," the report briefly describes methods used to evaluate project operations and outcomes. It then identifies 10 key issues influencing the project's success and, in some cases, proposes changes in project design. Finally, it examines some of the achievements of "Study Talk," including increased teacher awareness of the importance of oral language to learning, greater student interest in classroom activities, and more effective curriculum development processes. (MM)

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STUDY TALK
Queensland's contribution to the National Language Development Project

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November 1982

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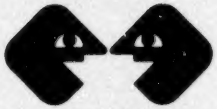

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CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
GETTING STARTED	2
THE ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK	2
SELECTING THE FOCUS AND STYLE FOR STUDY TALK	3
SPREADING THE WORD	3
INVITING THE SCHOOLS	4
SERVICING THE NETWORK	4
STYLE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION COMPONENT	4
KEY ISSUES	5
The 'Bottom-up' Research and Development Model	5
Selection of Oral Language as the Focus	6
Commitment of the Three Systems	6
Selection of Project Schools and Contact Persons	7
Servicing the Schools – Representativeness Versus Accessibility	7
Process or Product	8
Teacher Ownership of the Project	8
The Project Logic	8
Incentives to Participate	9
The Role of the Project Officer	9
ACHIEVEMENTS OF STUDY TALK	10
Increasing Awareness	11
Educating the Participants	11
Outcomes for Students	11
Outcomes for Schools	11
Sharpening the Curriculum Development Processes	12
Tangible Products	12

INTRODUCTION

In 1977, the project which came to be called the Language Development Project (LDP), was launched. The first task was a feasibility study sponsored jointly by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) and the National Committee on English Teaching (NCET). (The events leading up to the commencement of the project, and a detailed account of the events of the early years of the LDP are contained in *Language Development Project*, a *Project Report* of the Curriculum Branch, Department of Education, Queensland, July 1980.)

The feasibility study, marking the first phase of the LDP, was completed in 1978, clearing the way for the detailed planning of a second phase. The resulting proposal called for an eight-year, $1.5 million project to develop the linguistic abilities of children in school Years 5 to 8. It was during this second phase that State project teams were formed and State evaluators were appointed.

This evaluation report is based on the Queensland evaluator's contacts with the Queensland component of the LDP, *Study Talk*, from early 1980 to early 1982. During this period, the evaluator was in contact with the Study Talk Management Committee, the project team, teachers in project schools and associated tertiary institution personnel, other State evaluators and the national evaluator for the LDP.

The report does not deal with the accomplishments of individual school projects undertaken as part of *Study Talk*; rather, it attempts to identify, from the detailed information available, a number of issues which appeared to play a vital role in the fortunes of the project. That is, this evaluation report deals with macro-level concerns and outcomes of *Study Talk*.

The report begins with an outline of the procedures and organisational structures that were used to set up and conduct the project, *Study Talk*. Then, after a brief account of the evaluation methods used, 10 Key Issues are identified and each is discussed in terms of its effects on the project. Finally, some of the major achievements of *Study Talk* are examined.

GETTING STARTED

The sequence of events leading to the establishment of the Language Development Project will be recounted by the National Evaluator*. This report takes as its starting point the events surrounding Queensland's entry to the national project and then treats these but briefly. A more detailed coverage of the early days of the Queensland project can be found in the July 1980 *Project Report on the Language Development Project*, produced by the Curriculum Branch of the Queensland Department of Education.

In April 1979, officers of the Curriculum Development Centre visited the Director-General of Education in the Queensland Department, for discussions with him about the LDP. The discussions led to a proposal to form an advisory panel in Queensland, which would include representatives of the three Queensland school systems. The advisory panel was formed in November 1979, and had the task of identifying and explicating a task for submission to the CDC, as Queensland's possible contribution to the LDP.

Six suggestions for Queensland's participation in the LDP were prepared by Curriculum Branch and presented to the advisory panel for consideration. In the event, it was decided that the focus should be on oral language in school Years 5 to 8, and that the three broad aspects of language development espoused by the LDP – learning language, learning through language and learning about language – should be incorporated. An amalgamation of two of the six options satisfied these requirements. The proposed project was given the name *Study Talk*. In June 1980 the proposal for *Study Talk* was transmitted to the CDC. The CDC endorsed the *Study Talk* proposal and offered a grant. With the acceptance of this grant by the three Queensland systems in September 1980, Queensland became a part of the LDP, albeit a little later than most of the other States and territories. *Study Talk* had the support of the State Department, the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools.

THE ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Once *Study Talk* was formally accepted as a project, its management was structured in the following way:

1. The advisory panel was replaced by an inter-systemic management committee chaired by an inspector of schools in the State Education Department.
2. A project team, consisting of five officers from the State's Curriculum Branch, augmented from time to time by an officer from the Catholic sector, was established. All officers were to work part-time on *Study Talk*. A project officer from the Curriculum Branch was appointed to lead the team.
3. A resource panel was to be formed. This panel was intended to be flexible in size and composition, and its task essentially was to provide a pool of expertise which could be called upon in the service of the project. The resource panel idea did not become a working reality throughout the life of the project.
4. Contacts were established with tertiary institutions, through nominated 'contact persons' in the institutions. The possibility of a number of 'associated projects' was envisaged, whereby tertiary institutions would initiate projects in the oral language area, which might complement the work going on in project schools.
5. Through *Study Talk* conferences, printed publicity, personal contacts of members of the project team and nominations of regional directors of education, a number of schools were identified with an interest in taking part in *Study Talk*. Some of these schools put forward proposals to conduct *Study Talk* projects, and these schools became part of the network of project schools. In each of the schools, a liaison person was identified to serve as the focal point for communication about *Study Talk*.
6. Attempts were made to involve the community in *Study Talk*, and invitations were issued to community groups to attend *Study Talk* workshops and conferences.

Thus the scene was set for a project that would embrace primary and secondary schools, tertiary institutions and community groups, with direct support provided by a project team, and overall direction given by a management committee.

* The report of the National Evaluator for the Language Development Project is to be published by the Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, in 1983.

SELECTING THE FOCUS AND STYLE FOR STUDY TALK

At the time of the deliberations by the advisory panel about the nature of Queensland's contribution to the LDP, there was considerable community pressure for schools to give increased emphasis to literacy. However, the panel felt that the time was right to focus on oral language, an area it believed had suffered from neglect. The panel considered that oracy was an important prerequisite to successful development in the other areas, especially literacy.

At the same time, the three aspects of language that were being promoted by the CDC – learning language, learning through language and learning about language – were taken aboard as being a very appropriate way of viewing the development of oral language. Similarly, the CDC's suggested concentration on school Years 5 to 8 was adopted in Queensland.

Study Talk could therefore be seen as a project that encompassed the general priority areas held by the CDC and applied them to a curriculum area, oral language, held to be important in Queensland.

The LDP had already opted for a 'bottom-up' style of curriculum development. This was a notion that received strong support at the 1978 LDP Conference. Such an approach called for a minimum of direction from the centre, with the freedom and the responsibility given to schools to initiate and develop their own projects, supported from time to time by central teams. The advisory panel decided at an early stage that *Study Talk* should be based on this style of curriculum development.

While Rosen, Barnes and others[1] had written about oral language, at the time oral language was a virtually unexplored curriculum area in most Queensland schools. It was decided to adopt an 'inquiry-based approach in which students and teacher investigate living language together' (John Carr, *English in Australia*, No. 58, December 1981, page 13). In a sense, all of those involved in *Study Talk* – the advisory panel, the project team, project schools and associated tertiary institutions – could be seen as embarking on a collaborative investigation into oral language in schools.

SPREADING THE WORD

Several methods were used to generate awareness of *Study Talk*. One of the methods was a planned series of conferences and workshops. The first, in June 1980, was restricted to members of the project team, the advisory panel and representatives of the tertiary institutions and was concerned with early planning of *Study Talk* tasks. The second conference, in October 1980, involved participants from schools, tertiary institutions, the project team and the advisory panel. A major intended outcome of the October conference was that project tasks for 1981 could be identified, and that the process would be started whereby project schools could be selected. In April 1981, a two-day workshop was a forum for schools to discuss their intended projects, but served also to further discuss and clarify some of the major conceptual issues of the project. Each of the conferences and the workshop were held in Brisbane. Apart from the Brisbane meetings, project teachers from several schools in Toowoomba were brought together in the Toowoomba area on the initiative of one of the tertiary institution representatives.

Between July 1980 and November 1981, seven *Study Talk* newsletters were distributed to members of the *Study Talk* network. The newsletters served to keep network members up to date with happenings in the Queensland project, gave an overview of developments in the LDP projects in other States and territories, and provided information about useful resources for oral language work.

It was intended to distribute *Study Talk* bulletins to all Queensland schools as a way of raising awareness about *Study Talk* and its concepts, in schools outside the *Study Talk* network. One *Study Talk Bulletin* was distributed in February 1981. Since then, no further bulletins have been produced.

1 For example: Barnes, D., Britton, J. & Rosen, H., *Language, the learner and the school*, Penguin Books Ltd, Middlesex, England, 1969.

Two posters were sent to all Queensland schools during 1981. These were intended to create a general awareness in schools of *Study Talk*, and to stimulate inquiries.

In October 1981, the 'Education Mail' page of Brisbane's *The Courier-Mail*, was devoted to an article on *Study Talk*. Thus the project was brought to the attention of the wider community.

Other opportunities have been taken to promote *Study Talk* outside the network, and community groups (such as Rostrum) have been invited to attend *Study Talk* conferences and workshops.

INVITING THE SCHOOLS

Both formal and informal methods were used to invite schools to participate in *Study Talk*. Letters were sent to regional directors of education, asking them to nominate any schools in their regions which might be invited to participate. The project team would then take up discussions directly with the nominated schools. This method of contact was used particularly with the geographically more isolated schools.

However, informal methods were used often, and these methods proved reasonably successful in that a considerable number of the schools so approached became project schools. Usually, contact was established through a member of the project team who had once taught with a school staff member in the school approached, or who had some other personal knowledge of staff members in particular schools.

About half of the schools approached were in the south-east corner of the State, and the others were fairly widely scattered in areas such as the far north, north-west, Darling Downs, the near north coast and the Murgon area.

SERVICING THE NETWORK

Publications of the *Study Talk* project, such as the *Study Talk Newsletter*, were used to solicit and generate ideas about oral language and to exchange information about what was being done in project schools. However the major form of servicing was by personal visits to the schools by members of the project team.

Because *Study Talk* was conceived of as a bottom-up approach to curriculum change, visits were made (initially at least) when requested by a school. As the project progressed and relationships with schools took shape, project team members would sometimes 'ask schools to invite them to visit'.

Approximately 30 schools, tertiary institutions and community groups were visited at some time by the project team. Geographically remote schools usually received only one visit, while five schools each received five or more visits, to a maximum of about nine visits to one school. Most of the school visits were concentrated in the south-east part of the State, in Brisbane, the Murgon and Noosa areas and the Darling Downs. In addition to the servicing provided by the project team, at least two of the tertiary institutions provided consultancy to project schools.

STYLE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION COMPONENT

I was engaged as the evaluator for *Study Talk* in the early part of 1980. My first task was to prepare and submit an evaluation design. So, at the time I became involved, most of the work leading to the selection of *Study Talk* as Queensland's contribution to the Language Development Project had been completed. However, I was on the scene early enough to take part in two or three of the advisory panel meetings prior to its replacement by the management committee. While I had been a member of the advisory panel, I was not a member of the newly-constituted management committee.

A draft evaluation design for *Study Talk* was presented at the first *Study Talk* Conference, in June 1980. It was presented as a tentative proposal, and suggestions were sought from the participants about ways in which it might be amended. However no suggestions were received at the conference or at any time later.

In keeping with the proposal for the national evaluation of the LDP, it was proposed that the *Study Talk* evaluation be essentially formative in style, and interactive in the sense that procedures would be directed by changes in the project rather than by a particular model of evaluation. Thus data collection would be both exploratory/extensive, and intensive, according to whether there was a need to identify issues, or to explore particular issues in depth.

Broadly, it was proposed to investigate three aspects of *Study Talk* – the context, the processes and the products. Evaluation of 'products' of *Study Talk* was to have taken place during 1982 and beyond. The premature termination of developmental activities in *Study Talk*, resulting from the closure of the CDC, meant that developmental work was still in its early stages in Queensland by early 1982. It has therefore not been possible to do justice to the product evaluation at the time of writing this report.

Information about the context and the processes of *Study Talk* has been gathered in a variety of ways:

- There has been liaison with the project team, particularly at points when the project team had information to share about developments in the projects, and when the evaluator was seeking contextual information or passing on evaluative comments.
- All of the printed materials distributed by the project team have also been made available to the evaluator.
- Project team members have been formally interviewed about the clusters of schools they each serviced.
- The evaluator has visited six of the project schools and held interviews with the staff members concerned with *Study Talk*, and in some cases, with the school principals.
- Interviews have also been held with staff of some of the tertiary institutions, and with members of the management committee representing each of the three school systems.
- The evaluator has attended the *Study Talk* conferences and the workshop, and, in addition to the informal information gathered there, has administered short questionnaires to seek the views of participants on particular issues.
- A small questionnaire survey was conducted among all project schools to gain an overview of progress and perceptions about the individual school projects and about *Study Talk* in general.

In the event, the evaluation fell short of the one proposed. Ideally, the evaluation called for close and frequent interaction between the evaluator and the project team, and between the evaluator and the participating schools. The ideal level of interaction would have called for a much greater commitment of time than the evaluator was able to give to this project. As it turned out, the evaluation was directed as much by the times when the evaluator could work on *Study Talk*, as by the emergence of issues and their timely exploration.

Nevertheless, a number of key issues emerged strongly, and discussion of these will form the basis of most of the remainder of this report.

KEY ISSUES

The issues discussed below are those that appeared during the course of the evaluation and proved by their persistence to have an importance beyond the particular circumstances in which they arose. In many cases, the concerns that they reflect were voiced by more than one of the groups involved in *Study Talk*. It was common, for example, for a similar concern to be voiced by members of the project team and by tertiary institution representatives, or by school personnel and members of the project team.

The 'Bottom-up' Research and Development Model

The LDP commitment to a research and development model in which classroom teachers were invited to take part both in the identification of areas to be investigated and in the investigation of those areas, was adopted for *Study Talk*. The project team, consequently, saw its role as facilitator and advisor, rather than leader and initiator. However, it became clear that neither the project team nor many network teachers were entirely happy with such an approach, and a certain amount of ambivalence, if not confusion, was the result.

This is not to suggest that such a project should not accommodate a certain amount of ambivalence and uncertainty. However, if a 'bottom-up' project is to function successfully, certain features might be necessary.

One of the necessary features would be the existence of ample project time to allow participants to work their way towards security of understanding. Here 'time' should be taken to mean both gestation time and time-on-task. As it turned out the shortened *Study Talk* did not allow time for security of understanding to develop and many participants were still not sure of their understandings when the time came to finalise developmental work on projects and concentrate on products. A fair amount of the unease expressed by a sizeable minority of project teachers could be attributed to their not receiving the direction they felt they needed, especially in the early months of their involvement. The project team, for their part, also suffered from uncertainty – uncertainty about the amount of direction they should give, whether they should initiate consultations with project schools, and the extent to which they should be openly critical of the approaches being adopted in some project schools.

A further prerequisite for the successful operation of the 'bottom-up' approach would seem to be that participants have a reasonable theoretical and experiential grounding in the area to be explored. It could be argued that very few participants, whether in project schools, on the project team or on the management committee, were well grounded in the theory and practice of oral language development.

A related prerequisite is close liaison and frequent communication among all parties participating in the 'bottom-up' model. The fact that the project team was part-time on *Study Talk* meant that it was difficult for the members to maintain close contact with all project schools. Nevertheless, the records show that some schools were visited fairly frequently, and considerable effort was put into written communication with schools. However, schools at a distance greater than a few hours drive from Brisbane could not receive the type of on-the-spot support that they probably needed. There is no direct evidence that school staff felt they should have received more visits. However, staff of schools remote from Brisbane would have the expectation that they would not receive frequent personal visits, so they might not bother to mention it.

In many ways the 'bottom-up' approach was not as effective as it might have been. Those engaged in future attempts to use this form of curriculum development would do well to ensure that there is sufficient time, a reasonable knowledge base and adequate communication, to the extent that it is possible to exercise control over such factors.

Selection of Oral Language as the Focus

In the words of one participant, oral language was a 'thin area'. This fact produced both the incentive to tackle a project in the oral language area and a set of problems for the research and development effort. On the one hand, the management committee realised that oral language was basic to literacy in reading and writing; that, compared to other aspects of language, oral language had long been neglected in most schools, and indeed, in centrally devised curricula. So the need to put substantial effort into the area was obvious. On the other hand, it was also obvious that there would be difficulties related to paucity of knowledge and experience in the oral language area. Even at the international level, major concern about oral language is a recent phenomenon, and the theories so far developed are far from elaborate. At the local level, there were few if any 'experts' in the area, and a general lack of experience in putting oral language techniques into practice in an organised way. These problems were highlighted when the project team found, while trialling the feasibility of conducting a 'Survey of Practice', that there was no common language that they could use with teachers in the field, that would adequately describe their practice with oral language.

This issue is obviously related to that of time. *Study Talk*, being a very exploratory project, required sufficient time to allow participants to develop common understandings and a common language about oral language development. The shortened project did not allow time for these things to occur on a general level, before the development phase had to be called to a halt.

Commitment of the Three Systems

On the face of it, *Study Talk* was a project to which each of the three systems was committed. The State Education Department, the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools were all represented on the advisory panel and on the subsequent management committee. Approval was sought and obtained from each system before the proposal for *Study Talk* was sent to the CDC, and the CDC grant for the project was similarly accepted on behalf of all three systems. For some time a representative of the Catholic Education Office worked alongside the Departmental members of the project team. So officially, each system seemed committed to participation in the project.

However, the official commitment of each system did not always carry through strongly to the school level. Almost all of the 20 schools which mounted *Study Talk* projects were State schools.

There are several possible explanations for the lack of participation of non-State schools in *Study Talk*. The project may have been viewed by people from non-State schools as predominantly a State project. Although there were non-State representatives on the committees and the project team, members were drawn overwhelmingly from the State system, and official positions such as chairman and project officer were held by people from the State system. While the State system has a well-developed network through its head office, regional offices and schools, the non-State systems operate on a less formal network. This is especially so in the case of the Association of Independent Schools. These factors may have made it easier for members of the project team, most of whom had been used to working predominantly in the State system, to access State schools.

Representatives of the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools were not able to offer explanations for the non-involvement of non-State schools, that would not also be explanations for the non-involvement of State schools. The pressure of work, and commitment to other projects, such as involvement in a multicultural program, were the reasons put forward. It was also suggested that, because *Study Talk* did not come 'with a load of goodies to trial', teachers were not so anxious to become involved at a time when they were busy anyway.

Realistically, *Study Talk* has to be seen as a project that took place in State schools, with support coming essentially from within the State system. Attempts to develop *Study Talk* as an inter-systemic project failed.

Selection of Project Schools and Contact Persons

As indicated earlier in this report, schools were invited to participate in *Study Talk* either by personal approach by a member of the project team, or through recommendations by Departmental regional directors. In addition, notices were placed in official publications, including those of the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools. In some cases, such selection methods seem to have worked well. However, the failure of a considerable number of selected schools to come to grips with the project and make a real contribution, might be attributable in part to faulty selection methods.

Several factors emerged through discussions in schools and with members of the project team. First, insufficient time may have been taken over the selection of project schools and contact persons. It seems the staff of some schools did not realise the amount of work that would be involved, and, when they did, they either dropped out or assumed a passive role. A second factor related to the selection of contact persons. In some cases the people selected were not well placed within the school to harness the support of teachers who would work on the project. An associated factor was the inability, in some cases, of school contact persons, on returning to school from *Study Talk* conferences and workshops, to convince fellow staff members of the importance of *Study Talk* and of the principles upon which it was based.

Servicing the Schools – Representativeness Versus Accessibility

In a State the size of Queensland the problem of geographical distance is always present in curriculum research and development. Historically, there is a tendency to seek representativeness, especially with respect to geographical areas. A question faced by the management committee was whether to concentrate project efforts initially on a small number of schools readily accessible to the project team, or to ensure that project schools were reasonably representative of the geographical regions of Queensland. The latter course was decided upon.

Consequently, it was impossible for the (part-time) project team to give a high level of personal support to all of the schools involved. With the benefit of hindsight, it may have been better to limit participation initially to a smaller number of schools (say eight to 10), in one or two areas close to Brisbane. These schools might then have received the high level of support and consultation necessary in such an exploratory project. Experiences from these schools could then have been passed on to other schools in a later phase of *Study Talk*.

There was a correlation between frequency of visits by members of the project team and the quality of work on *Study Talk* being done in schools. Generally speaking, those schools which were visited most frequently seem to have become more thoroughly involved in *Study Talk*. This was not always true, however. Some schools which were frequently visited failed to become involved and, in terms of lack of immediate results at least, a good deal

of time was 'wasted' on them. It is not possible to assume a causal relationship between frequency of project team visits and quality of project work done in schools. Apart from the case of schools which were exceptions to the correlation noted above, there was probably also a natural tendency for project team members to visit more frequently those schools where worthwhile developments were taking place.

Process or Product

In attempting to assess the value of a research and development project, both processes and products have to be considered. *Study Talk* began officially in Queensland in September 1980. To the time of writing, this represents some 18 months spent on the project – a short time indeed for a project of this nature. So it is not really surprising that there are few well-developed products to hand. Considering the short time for which the project has been operating, the part-time status of the project team, and the full-time teaching duties of project teachers, the amount of tangible outcome that will emerge is quite reasonable.

However, the amount of learning that has taken place through the processes of *Study Talk* seems to be considerable. Certainly many of the project teachers have reported substantial changes in their thinking about oral language, and many reported that they will be teaching more oral language in future. A small number of schools have already used their experiences with *Study Talk* to make changes to their language curricula; this has applied even in schools that did not fully participate in *Study Talk* projects. At least one tertiary institution will give more representation to oral language in course offerings as a result of the involvement of personnel with *Study Talk*. While there is no direct evidence, reliable sources have reported that some senior administrators in the Department of Education have re-thought their ideas on language, largely because of their contact with *Study Talk*.

So it would appear that *Study Talk* will have a continuing influence on language in Queensland schools. This is not to say that the processes of *Study Talk* have worked as well as might have been hoped. For example, there is but little evidence at this stage that *Study Talk* projects in schools were able to influence non-project teachers, particularly teachers of subjects other than English. There is also little evidence that 'networking' has occurred among schools, so that there would be continuous sharing of ideas and the possible entry of other schools into *Study Talk* networks.

Teacher Ownership of the Project

A feature of highly successful 'bottom-up' curriculum development projects is often a high degree of teacher 'ownership' of the project. That is, teachers come to view and promote the project as their own, and in doing so display a high level of enthusiasm and self-motivation. This feeling was evident among some teachers in a few of the schools visited during the evaluation. However, in the majority of cases it does not appear that teachers felt they 'owned' *Study Talk*.

A staff member of a tertiary institution reported that the institutions' slow start in becoming involved with *Study Talk*, followed by the Government's decision to discontinue support for the project, militated against strong tertiary institution involvement, at a time when they had begun to get enthusiastic. Perhaps similar reasons could be advanced for teachers generally not coming to 'own' *Study Talk*. In any event, the lack of time for promotional and developmental work was most likely a key factor, along with the geographical spread of *Study Talk* schools and the tradition (and therefore the expectation) of centrally controlled curriculum development in this State.

The Project Logic

The project, as first envisaged, entailed a logical progression through three major processes. These processes were:

1. surveying knowledge and opinion and reviewing the literature to establish an information base;
2. creating out of this information base a framework for the project; and
3. applying this framework to the identification, promotion and conduct of school and associated projects.

As it turned out, there was a good deal of overlap between these processes, and in fact no clear framework for *Study Talk* emerged before school projects were begun. The compression of what might be described with hindsight as the logical chronological sequence of processes, seems to have occurred with a view to completing the

project (or at least creating some products) within a certain time frame. This is understandable given the pressures that exist within education systems to produce tangible results in the short term. However, it does seem to contradict some things that have been learned, through this project, about 'bottom-up' curriculum development, and at the very least it helps to explain the lack of clarity that continued in some schools well into the development phases of their projects.

Incentives to Participate

Queensland's budget for *Study Talk* from September 1980 to June 1982 was $25 000. This budget had to cover such items as conference expenses, materials and resources, publications, newspaper advertisements, travel and accommodation expenses for the project team, evaluation expenses, and grants to schools participating in the project. It is clear that the grants available to schools would be very small, perhaps in the order of a few hundred dollars. There was certainly insufficient money available to *Study Talk* for payment of replacement teachers, should some form of block release of project teachers be considered desirable.

The three school systems, for their part, met the salaries of officers involved on the *Study Talk* project team and on the management committee. In addition, the systems were prepared to release teachers from their normal school duties to attend a small number of short-duration workshops and conferences on project topics.

So there was no way of compensating schools for longer-term release of project teachers to allow them extended periods to work on *Study Talk*. All *Study Talk* activity within school had to be conducted in addition to teachers' normal duties. While there is truth in the argument that *Study Talk* activities could be incorporated into normal teaching rather than be a tacked-on extra, such an argument cannot deny the need for much extra time and effort during the planning and development of such activities. In short, the incentives offered to school personnel for their participation in *Study Talk* were not great.

The Role of the Project Officer

As early as September 1977, when he was appointed to the Curriculum Branch of the Department of Education, the project officer for *Study Talk* had known that he would be involved with the Language Development Project. At that time he assumed the role of liaison officer for Phase 1 of the LDP, and this led naturally to his selection as project officer for *Study Talk* in 1979. Approximately 50 per cent of his working time was allocated to this task.

There were two main aspects to the role of *Study Talk* project officer. One part of the role was associated with the conceptual development of the project and the other with aspects of project administration. Of these two aspects of the role, the conceptual aspect was considered by the project officer to be the key one.

It was in this aspect of role that the major dilemma occurred for the project officer. On the one hand he felt that he was expected to provide conceptual/intellectual leadership in the project, while on the other hand *Study Talk* was designed as a 'bottom-up' project, implying that with a minimum of direction, ideas would flow up 'from below'. While the project officer had a clear idea in his own mind of the conceptual model that should be used, he was unsure of the extent to which he should push it as the operational model for *Study Talk*. In the event, he played a low-key conceptual role and felt, in retrospect, that he should have been prepared to promote the model he had in mind. A similar type of dilemma occurred in his interactions with project schools, when he often had to steer a difficult middle course between telling schools what they should be doing (or at least being overtly critical of projects that were unacceptable) and accepting as valid contributions to *Study Talk* virtually everything that project schools engaged in under the *Study Talk* umbrella.

Project administration involved the project officer in working on the project himself; overseeing others who were working on it both in schools and on the project team; reporting the progress of the project to members of the project network and to responsible bodies; writing up the results of the project and organising the print and non-print products; and carrying out routine clerical tasks.

All members of the project team, including the project officer himself, acknowledged that they lacked background in certain areas. This compounded the task of project oversight. On occasions this lack of background brought the project to a halt. Project team members gradually identified with particular project schools which they then looked after themselves. Again the project officer was inclined to steer a course between injecting too much of himself and becoming too little involved in the work of other members of the project team.

During the course of *Study Talk*, the project officer made more than 100 visits to schools and institutions associated with the project. He felt strongly that it was virtually impossible to 'get people to a product' by telephone or by written communication. At the same time, the majority of his visits were frustrating either because teachers lacked the time to spend with him, or because his initial impression that teachers had understood or had undertaken to complete a task was not borne out in actuality.

Trouble-shooting was part of the role that the project officer accepted, but he felt that most problems were those of omission rather than commission, so that he often became aware of problems too late. Rather than handling emergency situations, he found himself spending a lot of time 'urging and facilitating'.

The project officer viewed reporting 'upwards' as a very necessary check on his own actions and as a way of forcing himself to make decisions that he might otherwise have put off. Similarly, he viewed his role as Queensland's representative at national LDP meetings as a disciplining and therefore worthwhile one.

While he viewed the conceptual role as the key one, the project officer felt that writing and editing were the major tasks to be performed in *Study Talk*, as they are, in his opinion, in any curriculum development project. This opinion, he noted, was confirmed by the other project officers. During *Study Talk*, it was extremely difficult to encourage teachers to write up their ideas. When teachers could be encouraged to write, the project officer found himself faced with a further dilemma – to re-write contributions in what he saw as an acceptable form, or to retain the flavour of the original, thereby accepting what might be 'inferior' work. 'There is an enormous gap between the sort of writing expertise of even the teachers that one does attract (to write) and the sort of level that is required for publication.' As far as his own and the project team's writing were concerned, he felt that there was insufficient time available for it.

One of the most difficult parts of the project officer's role was 'working with teachers who are quite rightly mainly concerned with getting through the week of teaching'. Again, project officers in most States apparently experienced this difficulty. In Queensland the difficulty appears to have been compounded by the rather specific form that *Study Talk* took (requiring in the ideal that teachers do things they were probably unused to doing) and by the rather meagre history in this State of consultants working with teachers in schools. In the project officer's words: 'Even to the end, the Queensland project team had difficulty in establishing meaningful working relationships with teachers in schools'. He said that both he and the others in the project team were prepared to offer much more than teachers in schools were willing or able to accept.

The Queensland project officer's over-riding feeling about his role was one of frustration. However, there were positive sides to his role, including the learning experience for him, the meeting and interacting with people, the satisfaction expressed by others about the products of *Study Talk*, and the enjoyable, stimulating and challenging aspects of the task.

Given the same task to perform again, the project officer feels that he would argue strongly for a project that was broader and simpler than the one selected for *Study Talk*, and he would argue against the strongly 'bottom-up' approach that was adopted in Queensland. He is convinced that project outcomes would have been improved if basic surveys and other groundwork had been completed before project conferences, so that the project team could have taken more concrete ideas and even embryonic materials to schools.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF STUDY TALK

It is all too easy, as a project evaluator, to underemphasise the achievements of the project in question and to focus most energy and attention on the things that went wrong or the things that could have been done better. This is a natural consequence of the desire to present information that might lead to future improvements. In the section, Key Issues, prominence is given to such negative aspects, and reasons are postulated for instances of failure or limited success. 'If the project were to be undertaken again, what might be done differently?' is the basic type of question posed.

This section examines the positive aspects of *Study Talk*, and attempts to highlight the institutional and personal learnings that have resulted, along with the tangible outcomes that have been produced. Inevitably, this catalogue of successes is only part of the full picture. The subtle effects of *Study Talk* on current theory and practice, and the long-term effects, can only be guessed at.

Increasing Awareness

There is little doubt that more teachers are now aware of the importance of talk in the learning process, than was the case prior to *Study Talk*. Conferences and workshops, bulletins and newsletters reached large numbers of teachers. There is evidence that some of the printed material in particular was not carefully attended to, but this is by no means unusual. At least 80 educators were directly exposed to the principles of *Study Talk* through attendance at conferences of at least a full day's duration. It is highly likely that ideas about oral language were changed at these conferences – indeed, a number of those interviewed reported that this was so.

In addition to the fairly intensive exposure through conferences, workshops and regular receipt of printed matter, general awareness of *Study Talk* was raised in other ways. Chief among these were posters that were sent to every school, and a full-page article in Queensland's largest circulation morning newspaper.

Educating the Participants

For some participants, the effect of involvement with *Study Talk* went beyond awareness to the point where it became an educational experience for them. It was not uncommon for teachers in project schools to report, during interviews, that their concepts about oral language had changed substantially as a result of their involvement. In some cases, this educative experience had already led them to make changes to their course organisation and their teaching approaches. It was not uncommon for teachers to express a new appreciation for what they had come to see as a common-sense notion – that talk is very important in the school learning process.

Outcomes for Students

This evaluation did not include components for observation of classes in progress, or for interviews with students. Information gathered about the reactions of students to *Study Talk* class activities was reported by teachers, school principals and members of the project team who had both observed and taught classes during their visits to project schools.

In schools where *Study Talk* activities were in progress, it appears that the actual amount of student talk in class had increased. It was usually reported that students were enjoying the activities that involved them in talk. In some schools, students were being exposed to wider varieties of talk than they had previously experienced. For example, different dialects and different registers of English were being examined and puppet plays and radio broadcasts were being produced. Even in those schools where teachers did not seem yet to have sorted out particularly well organised ways of examining language and extending students' facilities with language, this exposure will surely have positive effects. In those schools where teachers have successfully come to grips with these organisational matters, the effects on students should be appreciable.

Outcomes for Schools

The range of types of projects undertaken in the 20 *Study Talk* schools was wide, as might be expected where centralised control is kept to a minimum. Inevitably, the quality of projects varied considerably as well. In some cases, it was difficult to see that schools were engaged in activities that one would not expect to find going on in all schools anyway. However, it is possible that even seemingly mundane projects represented, for the people involved, a considerable development in their teaching approaches and philosophies. At the other end of the spectrum, a number of schools were engaged in projects which involved considerable insight and innovation. For example, three or four schools were working on developing functional approaches to the teaching of talk, or were examining varieties of spoken English. In a similar number of schools, projects had an experimental, analytical or evaluative focus so that they were in some important ways, breaking new ground. That some projects were not particularly inspiring must be accepted as a natural consequence of 'bottom-up' curriculum development.

Some schools had progressed with the development of their *Study Talk* activities to the extent that units of work had been developed for use by other teachers and in future years. In some cases, *Study Talk* activities had significantly affected the types of work programs that would be written for the following year. In fewer cases, schools had developed units of work that they felt could be used in other schools by other teachers. It was perhaps unfortunate that this aspect of *Study Talk* was not further developed, but the premature curtailment of the Language Development Project and the rather late start by Queensland schools virtually ensured that few

schools' projects would reach such a stage of development. However, the project team's collection and dissemination of ideas from project schools as *Study Talk* publications should ensure that some of the better work achieved in project schools will become available to other schools.

Sharpening the Curriculum Development Processes

The processes involved in a 'bottom-up' curriculum development project are quite different from those which occur in more traditional, centrally dominated projects. Some of the main differences are outlined in the Key Issues section of this report. The project team has learnt a lot about 'bottom-up' curriculum development during the course of *Study Talk*. This knowledge is bound to be applied in future curriculum development projects in which they are involved. Some of the learnings relate to very visible aspects of project management. For example, there is an acute awareness now of the time needed for such projects, and of the importance of the selection of appropriate program personnel. More subtle learning has also taken place, particularly with respect to such crucial management matters as when to intervene in and when to hold back from, processes that are unfolding in particular school situations. Curriculum developers with these kinds of experiences constitute a valuable resource for an education system.

Tangible Products

It is still not entirely certain whether any individual schools will produce products in the form of curriculum units, guidelines or some other 'tangible' form which can be used by other schools. However, at this time the prospect seems remote. The best of schools' initiatives will find expression in some form in the products to be produced by the project team. These products are in varying stages of development.

The tangible products of *Study Talk* will amount to three papers and one video production. One paper, a *Sourcebook on Language Study Activities*, outlines activities for inquiry based study of the uses of language by students in the upper primary and lower secondary schools. This will be published by the Curriculum Development Centre.

Two papers will be published by the Curriculum Branch of the Department of Education, Queensland. The *Report on the Survey of Opinion* is the result of a survey of opinion about spoken language, conducted among students, teachers, school principals and parents. The other, *The Second Phase ESL Learner: Strategies for the Diagnosis and Remediation of Error*, focuses on methodology for learners of English as a second language.

Work on a further publication which was to present a methodological perspective on oral language activities has been discontinued due to the curtailment of *Study Talk* activities. Development work put into it will contribute to other Queensland curriculum projects.

A 20 minute video, *In a Manner of Speaking*, is being produced in documentary form. It will allow students to examine some of the everyday varieties of spoken language as they occur throughout a day with one family. It is intended that a teachers book accompany the video.

The products that will become available through *Study Talk* will be significant in terms of both quality and number. However, there is little doubt that, had the project run its full course, additional quality productions of use to teachers would have resulted.

S. R. HAMPSON, Government Printer, Queensland